Ben Gurion Letter To French General Charles de Gaulle

December 6, 1967

My very dear General, or Monsieur le President

This is the third time that I am permitting myself the liberty of writing to you, an initiative that I have taken:

1) because at the close of our second meeting on the 17th of June, 1960 you assured me that you would welcome the continuation of direct contact between us and that I should write to you directly whenever I felt the need;

2) because though I would not have presumed to trouble you, having retired in the meantime, four years ago, from office for personal reason, at out meeting this year in the capital of West Germany at Dr. Adenauer's funeral we held a pleasant and friendly conversation at your request, even though you were aware that I was then merely a private citizen of Israel;

3) because I am concerned by your recent talk, much of which was devoted to the State of Israel, Zionism and the Jewish People, in which you made a number of troubling and regrettable statements; and because as an admirer and well-wisher of your even before I made your acquaintance in person and through correspondence, I hold you in great esteem, not because of your friendship and assistance to Israel over a period of many years, but because of the great historical act that you performed during and after the Second World War in saving the standing and honor of France, a country to which, I believe, our people and people everywhere must be grateful for all she has done for the cultural and social advancement of the human race from the time of the French Revolution down to the present.

I took exception to the unjust criticism leveled at your remarks by many people in France, Israel and other countries because I believed that they did not pay sufficient attention to your words. Nor would I, unless asked to do so by you, consider that I had the right to take issue with your views on French policies in regard to other nations, Israel included.

I do know, however, that there are a good many people in the Christian world who have an insufficient knowledge and understanding of Jewish experience, which is unique and unparalleled in the history of humanity not only in antiquity, but in the middle ages and in modern times as well. Thus, it is precisely because of the honor and respect that I feel for you that I consider it my moral duty toward my people, toward you, and toward the people of France, who did so much to help us in recent times both before and after the establishment of the Jewish State, to explain to you as best I can the true intentions and practical course of the State of Israel, whose Prime Minister and Minister of Defence I was for fifteen years after its establishment, during which time I played no small part in determining its foreign and military policies. In addition, I headed the Zionist leadership in Jerusalem for fifteen years before the establishment of the state, in which role I played an active and often decisive part in determining Zionist policy to and in anticipation of its creation.

In ancient times we were the first people in the world to hold to the faith in one God, a faith which with a few exceptions seemed incomprehensible and undesirable to the other nations, and for which we suffered a great deal. The Greeks called us a "godless people" because the found no statues of the gods in our settlements. The Romans accused us of idleness because we did not work one day of the week. I needn't tell you what was said about us by many Christians one Christianity which has grown in the Land of Israel and our of the Jewish People, but to which the Jews refused to adhere became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire.

Twice our independence in our homeland was destroyed. Jerusalem was razed to the ground by the triumphant Romans and even its name was temporarily erased. But our forefathers, who were exiled to Babylonia 2500 years ago, had taken an oath in memory of Zion by the Waters of Babylon:

> "If I forget thee O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning; may my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember thee, if I do not prefer thee to my greatest joy."

That oath was kept to this day. And all this took place before Paris, London, Moscow and other such places even existed.

You know as well as I do that many peoples adopted Christianity (and later Islam) under coercion. We too were threatened with death, and there were Jews who were unable or afraid to withstand this threat. But our people on the whole resisted and was ready to die for its faith. You no doubt know what happened to us in Spain in the fifteenth century and not only in Spain.

I know of no other people that was exiled from its land and dispersed among the nations of the world to be hated, persecuted, expelled and slaughtered (and in our own times, yours and mine, six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis) that did not vanish from history, did not despair or assimilate (though many individual Jews did), but yearned incessantly to return to its land, believing for two thousand years in its messianic deliverance and that indeed did return in our own times and renew its independence. And I know too that no people that ever lived in this land which in the Hebrew language was first called "Canaan" and then forever after "The Land of Israel" identified its life with it so completely, legion though its conquerors were (Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs , Seljuks, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Ottomans, English, etc.). This land was never the sole and unique homeland of any people in the world except the Jewish People.

I know that there is not another example in history of a people returning to its land after 1800 years, and that this is a unique occurrence; but there is another fact too, and this is that there was not a single generation in which Jews did not attempt (although not always successfully) to return to their land; and it was this fact which the entire Christian world, and the League of Nations, which was composed almost entirely of Christian countries, recognized as constituting the historic link between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel when it approved the Balfour Declaration.

We have the records of the Peel Commission, which was sent in 1936 to report on conditions and future prospects in Palestine, and which concluded at the end of its investigation: "It is clear to us that by the words 'Establishment of a National Home in Palestine' His Majesty's Government recognized that in the course of time a Jewish State was likely to be established, but it was not in their power to say when this would happen."

Moreover, the word "Palestine" referred to the territory on both sides of the Jordan, which has been the land of the Jews since the time of Joshua. It was not until 1922 that Winston Churchill, who was then Colonial Secretary, excluded Transjordan from the territory mandated to be the "national home" of the Jewish People.

It is a common but erroneous belief that the civilized world, including Russia (indeed, when the General Assembly met to take up the question in May 1947, it was Andrei Gromyko who first demanded the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine), decided in favor of a Jewish State only because of the tragedy experienced by the Jewish People during the Second World War, in which six million European Jews were murdered by the Nazis. There could be no greater mistake. The destruction of six million European Jews was in fact the cruelest and most frightful blow imaginable to the Jewish State, whose creation at the hands of European Jews had begun as early as 1870.

The first step toward the establishment of a Jewish State in our time was the founding of Mikveh Israel, the first Jewish agricultural school, by French Jews of the Alliance Israelite Universalle under the leadership of Crémieux, who was then Minister of Justice in the provisional French government set up after the downfall of Napoleon the Third.

Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine the goal of which was the renewal of Jewish independence in the Land of Israel began in 1870 with the establishment of the school in Mikveh Israel. The Jewish inhabitants from Russia, Rumania and other European countries, as well as from Africa and Asia, set about building agricultural colonies with the aim of making the wilderness bloom and establishing a Jewish State. This took place long before any Zionist "government" was in existence, and many years before the founding of the World Zionist Organization by Dr. Herzl, who published his book "The Jewish State" in 1896 and afterwards became the head of the Zionist movement.

How deep was the link between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel was proven by the fact that even when Herzl despaired of ever obtaining a charter for large-scale Jewish settlement in Palestine from the Turkish government, he turned to the British and was offered Uganda by Joseph Chamberlain; but when this offer came up for discussion at the Zionist Congress in 1904, the delegates refused to accept any substitute for Palestine and the question was removed from the agenda.

I myself was born in the Russian sector of Poland and I came to Palestine in 1906, when the country was still part of the Ottoman Empire. I never had the slightest doubt that millions of Jews could be settled in it on both sides of the Jordan without depriving a single Arab of his land, for less than ten percent of the country was then inhabited. I myself worked in several new Jewish settlements which existed in places that has previously been completely desolate.

And so, late in 1920, when the League of Nations approved the Balfour Declaration, I composed a memorandum dealing with Palestine on both sides of the Jordan, in the name of the International Po'alei Zion (the Socialist Zionist Party), which I sent to the British Labour Party. The gist of this memorandum was that in light of the League of nations resolution the problem of Palestine's borders could be solved in only one way - through the creation of a single political and economic entity which would eventually become a Jewish commonwealth. The British Labour Party accepted this position and until 1922 all of Palestine was mandated to be a Jewish national home.

As a resident of Palestine myself, however, I was well aware that there was an Arab problem too, and that the rights of the Arabs of Palestine has to be scrupulously observed; and so, late in 1933, immediately after my election to the Zionist leadership, I commenced negotiations with Moslem and Christian Arab leaders in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. I approached these talks (which began early in 1934) on the basis of two fundamentals. The Arab people possessed a bloc of countries ranging from Egypt to Morocco in North Africa, and from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the Middle East. The area of the Arab territories in North Africa was 8,195,964 square kilometers, and of the Arab countries in the Middle East, 3,607,929 kilometers, making a sum total of 11,863,873 square kilometers. (As of 1963, the population of these countries, which include Christian, Kurdish and Berber minorities, was 94,587,000). The area of Palestine on both sides of the Jordan, on the other hand, was only 60,000 square kilometers. (The inhabitants of this area as of 1963 numbered 4,181,000, 2,356,000 in Israel, and 1,825,000 In Jordan.)

After certain basic clarifications, these fundamentals were accepted by the other side as well: the Arabs had vast stretches of territory in North Africa and West Asia, populated by many millions, and mostly still subject to foreign rule. The area of Palestine was less than one-half of one percent of the Arab territories as a whole. The Arab population of Palestine on both sides of the Jordan was 1.5% of the Arab population of West Asia and North Africa.

In the consciousness of the Jews which is rooted in Jewish history and the Book of Books Palestine (on both sides of the Jordan) is the country of the Jewish People. But this country was not uninhabited; and ever since the Arab conquest in the 7th century, it had been populated by Arabs, whose number was now over a million, comprising 1.5% of the total Arab population of the world. Obviously, the Arab residents of Palestine deserved all the rights that any citizen of a democratic country should lay claim to, nor was a Jewish State imaginable in any other form than that of a democracy. And so I told the first Arab leader with whom I held talks, Auni Abdul Hadi, the head of the Palestinian Arstikla (Independence) Party:

> "We will help the Arab people to gain their independence and unite in a single Arab federation, if you in turn agree to assist us in establishing a Jewish State in Palestine on both sides of the Jordan, which would then enter into a Semitic (Arab-Jewish) federation as a sovereign state."

After discussing certain fundamental questions, Auni Abdul Hadi asked me: "How many Jews do you propose bringing to Palestine?" "In the course of twenty years," I answered (this was in 1934), "we will be able to bring 4 million Jews." He jumped to his feet in a mood of great excitement and exclaimed:

> "I'll go to Damascus and to Bagdad and I'll tell my Arab friends there: "We will let them have not four million, but six million on the condition that they help us to gain our independence and unite."'

When he had calmed down, however, he sat down again and remarked: "But you Jews are hared and more talented workers than we are. You'll be able to bring as many Jews as you like here in no time in even less than twenty years. What guarantee can you give us that the Arab people will really free themselves of foreign rule and unite?"

Now before beginning my talks with the Arab leaders, I had spoken to the British High Commissioner, General Wauchope, who was a very honest man. I told him that I was bout to begin negotiations with certain Arab officials; in the event that a Jewish- Arab agreement were reached, would the British government give it its backing? "I have never discussed this question with the government," he answered, "and I cannot speak in its name, but I do know how they think [I remember that he said "they"] and I am certain that they would support such an agreement." So I said to Abdul Hadi: "I'll bring you a guarantee from the British government." "Do you expect to believe those swindlers?" he asked contemptuously. "Then I'll bring you a guarantee from the League of Nations," I said. He thought for a while and replied: "The countries in the League of Nations are all Christian. I can't trust such countries." "My dear Mr. Auni," I answered, "I can't bring you a guarantee from Allah." And with that our conversation ended.

But the major part of the negotiations I carried on with Musa Alami, a confidant of the Mufti's, who was then the accepted leader of all the Arabs of Palestine. Alami had a reputation for being a decent, honest and loyal man. Our talks lasted over a period of several months, for after each session he was obliged to report to the Mufti and to convey the latter's questions and opinions back to me. I would then answer and make further queries, which he would relay to the Mufti once again. The basis for our discussions was the same idea that I had presented to Abdul Hadi: the liberation of the Arabs from foreign domination and their unification, and the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan, whose Arab citizens would enjoy absolute equality. And which would afterward play a role in an Arab federation.

After protracted negotiations lasting several months (the discussions were conducted in absolute secrecy on the part of both sides), we finally reached an agreement on the basis that I had suggested. The Mufti, however, insisted that I meet with the Syrian-Palestinian Arab Committee, whose headquarters were in Geneva, next door to the League of Nations. If the members of the Committee were amenable, he proposed to convoke the kings of the Arab countries Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iraq (Egypt was not then considered an Arab country) in order to sign an agreement with the Zionist leadership (the Jewish Agency) that could be presented to the Mandate government.

I also negotiated at the time with George Antonius, an Arab Christian from Syria then living in Palestine who was considered to be the leading theoretician of the Arab nationalist movement, and with Riad as-Sulah, the head of the Lebanese government, on the basis of the same proposal, to which they agreed in principle. (Riad as-Sulah was later assassinated by an Arab extremist.)

That same year I traveled to Europe in order to meet with the Arab Committee in Geneva. The Mufti informed them of my arrival and of the contents of our discussions. I met with two members of the Committee: Saki Arsalan, and elderly Druse, who had become an ardent Arab nationalist despite his background, and the Syrian Ikhsan Bey al-Jabri, Musa Alami's son-in-law. Of the two, Saki Arsalan, who headed the Committee, was the only one to speak. After I had briefly explained the basis of the agreement, he said to me:

> "You want a Jewish majority in Palestine, followed by a Jewish state; but the British will never permit you to become a majority how then can you expect it of us Arabs?"

After further discussion of this point, during which I saw that he was not to be budged, we parted. His young companion, Ikhsan Bey al-Jabri, accompanied me to the railroad station. After we left Arsalan's house, he said to me: "This isn't the last word we'll talk about it some more." Once again I was made to promise that everything that had passed between us would be kept a secret.

I was obliged to remain in Europe for several more weeks. When I returned to Jerusalem I was show a copy of La Nation Arabe, a French-language quarterly put out by the Arab Committee, in which a record of our entire conversation was printed with a number of slight distortions. Musa Alami, who was (and still is) an incorruptible man, was embarrassed to face me, even though I told him that I knew he was not responsible for the publication of the story.

Meanwhile, as the Second World War drew closer, the British government changed the policies of the Mandate: after a meeting of Arabs and Jews that took place in London in 1939, it issued a white paper whose contents in effect abrogated the Mandate's commitments by putting an end to Jewish immigration and promising the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within ten years. But before the ten years were over, six million Jews Jews who had needed a Jewish State more than anyone else and who had been eager and able to build it perished at the hands of the Nazis.

Winston Churchill, who had remained a loyal friend of the Jewish People and of the Balfour Declaration despite his White Paper of 1922, was not reelected prime minister after the war. The British Labour Party won an absolute majority for the first time and proceeded to set up a government.

The Labour Party was known to have been in favor of a Jewish State. Toward the end of 1944 it had adopted a resolution calling for the immediate establishment of a Jewish State on both sides of the Jordan as soon as the war was over and for the resettlement of the Arabs of Palestine in other Arab countries, which would also be granted full independence. This demand for resettlement had never once been voiced by the Zionist movement itself.

What happened at the end of World War II is well know: Bevin and Attlee refused to carry out their party's decision and handed the question of Palestine over to the United Nations instead. In May 1947, when the General Assembly took up the question, Andrey Gromyko, the Russian representative, surprised the delegates by calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine: the Jewish People, he said, had a right to a state of its own in its historic homeland. The committee which was chosen to investigate the problem made two recommendations. The committee was unanimous in demanding the earliest possible end to the British mandate; a minority of its members called for the establishment of an Arab-Jewish federal state, while the majority recommended partition the establishment of two separate states in Palestine west of the Jordan, a Jewish State to include the Negev and an Arab State, i.e., the west bank of the Jordan, which would be linked to the Jewish State economically. As for Jerusalem, it was proposed to make it a corpus separatus under international administration; the Jewish inhabitants of the city would be citizens of the Jewish state, and the Arab inhabitants, of the Arab state.

Though the exclusion of Jerusalem from the Jewish state was extremely painful to us, we voted by a large majority to accept the committee's recommendations. And so, had the Arabs agreed to the General Assembly resolution which obtained 33 affirmative votes, including those of Russia, the United States and France (England abstained), well over a two-thirds majority the problem would have been solved and peace would have come to the Middle East. But the Arabs refused to accept this decision and announced that they would oppose it by force if necessary. And in fact, a day after the partition resolution was passed by a large majority on November 29th, 1947, the Arabs commenced their attacks on the Jewish settlements of Palestine. As Syrians, Iraqis, and Egyptians from the Muslim Brotherhood joined the Palestinian Arab irregulars, these attacks grew more and more serious.

At the time there was a British army of about one hundred thousand men in Palestine, so that order could have been easily kept; but the Labour government, under the direction of Prime Minister Clement Atlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, was firmly opposed to a Jewish State and made no move to keep the peace or prevent the Arab assaults. The Jewish community defended itself by means of the underground Haganah, which was generally able to cope with the Arab bands, until the Arab Legion openly joined the irregulars, destroying four Jewish villages in the vicinity of Hebron and killing most of their inhabitants. Elsewhere the Haganah had the better of the fighting, defeating the irregulars in Haifa, Tiberias, Safed, and the new city of Jerusalem; in all these places it declared to the local Arabs that if they would surrender their arms they might remain where they were and enjoy equal rights with the Jews. Most of the Arab groups were agreeable, but a few suggested consulting the Arab High Committee, whose offices were not located in Palestine (most of its members having fled the country after one of them had assassinated a high British official). In effect, the decision fell to the Mufti of Jerusalem, who was also no longer in the country. The Arab High Committee called on the local Arabs not to turn in their weapons, but rather to evacuate Palestine completely for a period of two or three weeks, during which the British would withdraw and the armies of five Arab countries Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq would invade and finish the Jews off in 10 to 14 days. Then the Arab residents could return not only to their own homes, but to those of the Jews as well. The Arabs quit Safed, Beth-She'an and Tiberias to a man; in Haifa and in Jaffa several thousand chose to remain.

This brings me to what is called "the refugee problem." After the establishment of the Jewish State on May 14, 1948 not a single Arab was expelled from the country; the only Arabs to leave were a small number who subsequently emigrated to America. All those who are referred to today as "refugees" left their homes during the period of the British Mandate. Large numbers of Arabs began to leave within two days of the General Assembly resolution of November 29, 1947 calling for partition. Many Arabs resettled in the area west of the Jordan that had been designated an Arab state, while some of the more wealthy went immediately to Lebanon, or in some cases, to Syria. When guerilla warfare in the cities grew worse and in all the cities the aggressors were Arabs, not generally local ones, but rather groups organized in the neighboring countries (Syria, parts of Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq), and in the last days before the British withdrawal, the Arab Legion, which had been a part of the British Army the Arab residents were requested by their Jewish neighbors, and by the Haganah as well, to remain. On instructions from the Mufti in Egypt, however, nearly all of them fled. Once the Jewish State came into being, its doors were opened to Jewish immigrants; within four years 700,000 Jews entered the country, 500,000 of them from Arab lands: Iraq, Yemen, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Lebanon. Many settled in deserted Arab quarters in Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Beth She-an and Safed, others in deserted Arab villages. And yet, though hundreds of Jews were killed in the Arab attacks in cities and villages that began with the General Assembly resolution, not a single Jew chose to flee the country. Four hundred thousand Arabs did flee, while the Jewish refugees coming from Arab lands were deprived of all their property, which remains confiscated or divided up among their former Arab neighbors to this day. The State of Israel that was established on May 14, 1948 bears no responsibility for the flight of the refugees, yet it has taken back over forty thousand of them to assist in family reunification, even though they left through no fault of its own. We have absorbed an enormous number of Jewish refugees who were forced to leave all their money and possessions behind. We had no homes for them, no food, no work, but we made superhuman efforts to absorb and integrate them and we did this in the course of ten years, living in severe austerity until it was accomplished. The Arab states, on the other hand, have not lifted a finger to help the refugees who fled to their territories while the British still governed Palestine. Their rulers have learned to exploit the refugees as a political weapon against Israel. And now, my dear General, I come to certain surprising statements in your speech, statement that are both painful and insulting, and that are based on inaccurate or incorrect information that you happen to possess.

You spoke of the creation of a "Zionist" home between the two world war, of "an elite people, self-confident and dominating" who "might come to change into a fervent and conquering ambition their very touching hopes ('next year in Jerusalem')," of lack of humility, of a warlike State of Israel determined to expand, of those who dreamt of capitalizing on the closure of the Straights of Tiran, and so on.

Before I attempt to clarify certain facts and tendencies, I should like to make a point which for many historical and religious reasons has yet to be accepted in much of the world, but the consciousness of which prevails in all that we have done and will yet do; we are a people like all other people, with the same rights and obligations. We are a small people, the majority of which does not now live in its homeland and may perhaps never return there, but those who do live in it do so not because they have conquered, plundered or pillaged something belonging to others, but because when we found our land again it was neglected not entirely unpopulated, but largely desolate. We made this wilderness flourish by the sweat of our brow, by our stubborn and pioneering labor; we did not rob or take away a single inch of earth from those who worked it, but we did made the desert blossom. When I first came to Palestine, the place where Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city, now stands was a wilderness of sand dunes, without trees, without grass, without wild life, while nearby ran a stream which today irrigates even the kibbutz in the Negev on which I live, fifty kilometers south of Beersheba. Fifty-nine years ago I worked as a hired hand in a place that was so uninhabited and abandoned that twenty Bedouin were scarcely able to support themselves in the area; today it is a kibbutz, the home of 500 working adults and hundreds of children, one of the most magnificent farms in the Jordan Valley, bearing the name of the lake by which it was built: Kinneret.

This was not done by brute strength, nor solely by money, and certainly not by conquest, but by creative pioneering through which we turned a poor and arid soil into a fertile one and built settlements, villages and cities on desolate stretches of land where no living thing was to be found.

I am not ashamed of the word "Zionist," but the homeland that was promised us by England, with the consent of France, was meant to be a national home, not a "Zionist" one. "Zion" is one of our holiest and most precious places in Jerusalem, the City of David, but the "Zionists" were members of a movement that sought a return to "Zion" so that we could once again become a normal, independent people, rooted in its homeland, like most if not all other peoples. And in the declaration that was given by Balfour and later endorsed by the French government, we were promised the reconstitution of our national homeland, which had remained our land despite the fact that we were forcibly removed from it by foreign and cruel conquerors: for two thousand years not a day went by during which we did not pray and yearn to return to it. Prior to the French Revolution, in no country in which we lived did either we or the people in whose midst we dwelt regard that country as our own. After the Revolution, the Jews were accorded equal rights. This was one of the great moments of the French people that will never be forgotten by us. And yet the man who envisioned a Jewish State as far back as 70 years ago and captivated the majority of his people with that vision Dr. Theodor Herzl arrived at his illumination as a result of the Dreyfus Case and the frightful anti-Semitic revelations to which it gave rise. And again I say: we will never forget the moral bravery of men like Colonel Picquart, statesmen and men of conscience like Clemenceau, Zola, Jaurès and others, who stubbornly and heroically fought for justice, year after year, until they triumphed. But the hatred that emerged at the end of the 19th century appeared again and again in one country after another. Like men everywhere, we Jews see ourselves as sharing equal rights with all others, as a people with all the privileges that belong to any free and independent nation and we are sufficiently daring to believe that this is our due and not a favor to be benevolently conferred on us. I am fully aware that for hundreds of years the Christian world was convinced that the Jewish nation had ceased to exists two thousand years ago, nor is it any secret that there are Jews who believe the same today. We feel sorry for such Hews and we pity them, but we bear them no grudge. If they wish to cease being Jews, that is their business. But they do not speak in our name, just as it was not Pétain who spoke in the name of the French people during its great sorrow, but rather Charles de Gaulle, though he stood practically rejected and alone. I have read slanderous things about my people, for instance, said by a Jew whose stature I fully appreciate I am speaking of Karl Marx. I do not agree with all his theories, but I can nevertheless appreciate the greatness in his profound sense of history, his immense genius and his uncompromising struggle for a healthier and more just society.

We are not a "dominating" people. I realize that there are exceptions among us whose phraseology is alien to the great majority of the Jewish People and its sacred tradition. But for 15 years I held responsible positions in the Zionist movement and the Jewish community of Palestine, and for fifteen years that I was Premier and Defense Minister of the State of Israel and I know how profound is our ambition and how intense our desire for peace peace with our neighbors and peace among all nations. I was not the sole determinant during these years, neither in the Zionist movement nor in the State of Israel: I was obliged to convince most of my colleagues and most of my people of the rightness and justice of what I believed in, and in most cases I succeeded. Permit me, my dear General, to present you with several examples bearing on a number of remarks that you made in your speech.

A few days before our Declaration of Independence, the question arose of whether our country's borders should be specified in the Declaration. Two lawyers in the Provisional Government contended that we were legally bound to declare what our borders were. I was against this. In the first place, I argued, there was no such law did the American people announce what its borders were when it declared its independence? And secondly and this to me was the important thing I said to my colleagues that if the Arabs had been willing to accept the frontiers proposed by the United Nations General Assembly on November 19, 1947, none of us would have complained or challenged those frontiers, though I myself was of the opinion that they were largely unfair, particularly the exclusion of Jerusalem from the territory of our state and its transformation into an international entity, something that did no exist anywhere else in the world. Now you yourself, dear General, have spoken with grace and emotion of "the very touching hopes" that we Jews have had for the last 1900 years: "Next year in Jerusalem!" We did not change those hopes into a "fervent and conquering ambition"; rather we said (that is, I said and the majority supported me): "Had the Arabs accepted the United Nations Resolution as we did, there would have been no problem of frontiers. We reacted to the resolution with mixed joy and sorrow. But the Arabs have declared that they will oppose it and annihilate the state which we are going to declare three days from now. Even before we have declared out independence, they have commenced hostilities and the United Nations does not protect, much less compel them to accept the resolution. Under such circumstances, we too are excused from complying with the resolution, which would then fall on one side only. And o, if its possible to expand our frontiers in a war started against us by the Arab nations then let us liberate Jerusalem and the Western Galilee, so that they too can be part of our state."

Before the war began and it began in reality two days after the United Nations resolution, when the Arab attacked our commercial center in Jerusalem and the British did not even permit us to defend ourselves not a single one of us had suggested conquering additional territory. But we were not obliged to accept one rile for the Arabs and another for ourselves. If the United Nations meant nothing and the Arabs could behave as they wished then so could we. And our ties to Jerusalem preceded those of any other people now living in the world and of any other faith or religion.

And so, on the 14th of May, 1948 I declared the existence of a Jewish State to be called Israel in language that I had arrived at the previous evening and which had been confirmed by the Provisional Government on the morning of the same day, six hours before the solemn official declaration. In declaring the establishment of a Jewish State, I said: "From amid the bloody attacks that have been launched against us for the past several months, we appeal to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to keep the peace and to play their role in building the state on the basis of full citizenship, equal rights and appropriate representation in all its institutions, whether provisional of permanent." And to this I added yet another appeal: "We extend our hand in peace and neighborly friendship to all the neighboring states and their peoples, and we call on them to collaborate in mutual cooperation with an independent Jewish People in its land. The State of Israel is prepared to contribute its share toward a joint effort for progress throughout the Middle East." And every word that I read, my dear General, came straight from the heart, from the heart of every one of us; every party in Israel, from the Communists on the left to the religious-extremist Agudath-Israel on the right, from the Socialists to the Revisionists, all signed this declaration. Had our appeal been accepted, had the Arab nations complied with the General Assembly resolution and the United Nations Charter, there need never have been any war or quarrel between us and the Arabs to this day. Not a single one of us would have conceived of the idea of conquering additional territory beyond the frontiers fixed by the United Nations, for though we were far from satisfied with those frontiers, peace meant even more to us. But peace is either a two-way affair or an act of sheer fraud. Had the United Nations resolution been accepted by the Arabs, had they not sought to forcibly revoke it we would not have had to love six thousand of the cream of our youth during our War of Independence, which was forced on us eight hours after our independence was declared by the armies of five Arab states, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, which outnumbered us 40 to 1, and would never have had to fight the Sinai Campaign or the Six Day War. No one among us would have thought of attacking our neighbors in order to improve our frontiers and expand our territory. I myself publicly declared on many occasions and this was the position of our entire nation that we were prepared to sign a peace treaty for the next hundred years on the basis of the status quo. True, we did have a right wing which called for an "undivided Israel"; but even it never proposed and if it had, it would not have been taken seriously that we embark on a war of expansion. And yet the entire world or at any rate, the Christian world considered Palestine on both sides of the Jordan to be a single country, which the Jewish People had hoped would someday belong to it again, as was promised by the Bible and the Prophets. In the Book of Genesis it is written: "And the Lord appeared unto Abraham and said: Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Genesis, 12:7), and in Deuteronomy we read: "Then the Lord God will return thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. And the Lord they God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shall possess it" (Deuteronomy, 30: 3-5). The same belief can be found in the Prophets too, in Isaiah 56:8, Jeremiah 29:14, Ezekiel 11:17, Nehemiah 1:9. This was the intention of the Balfour Declaration, which was affirmed by France, and by the League of Nations when it approved the British Mandate. And yet, when the General Assembly decided to vote otherwise we accepted, and we would have kept faith with the decision had the Arabs kept the peace.

It is certainly true that for thousands of years we believed in the vision of our prophets, and there are still many of us who believe in the coming of the Messiah, who will bring the Jews from all over the world, the living and the dead, to the Holy Land. But this was never a "fervent and conquering ambition" rather it was a fervent belief in our prophets' vision of peace: "And national shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3). It is this psychic link to the Book of Books that constitutes the secret of our continued existence after the two destructions of our Temple by the Babylonians and the Romans, and after the hate with which the Christian nations surrounded us for sixteen hundred years.

When a British royal commission came to Jerusalem at the end of 1936 to weigh the future of the Mandate, I said to it: "Our Mandate is the Bible." It was from the Bible that we drew the strength to withstand a hostile world and to perpetuate our faith that we would one day return to our land and that peace would reign in the world.

And now, my dear General, I should like to remind you of the lunchtime conversation that we had in the Elysee Palace during my visit to you in June 1960. Present also were Prime Minister Debre and my colleague Shimon Peres. You asked me: "What are your dreams for the real borders of Israel? Tel me, I won't repeat them to anyone." I replied: "Had you asked me that same question 25 years ago, I would have said that our northern border should be the Litani River, and our eastern border Transjordan. It was on this basis that I negotiated with the Arab leaders. But you are asking me this question today. I'll tell you the truth: we have two main desires peace with our neighbors and a great Jewish immigration from abroad. The area of Palestine now in our hands can absorb a much greater number of Jews than are likely to ever come here, and so our present frontiers are sufficient. I could only wish that the Arabs would make peace with us on the basis of the status quo." And then you asked: "What is the relation between the State of Israel and the Jews of America?" " the Jews of America," I answered, "are politically, economically and culturally well-off, but they have a profound relationship with the State of Israel nonetheless."

And even after the Sinai Campaign and the Six Day war, I can assure you that these conflicts did not break out as a result of expansionist ambitions on our part. Had Egypt met the obligations that it took upon itself in acceptance of the Armistice Agreement, had it obeyed the United Nations resolutions on freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal, and especially, in the Gulf of Aqaba, and had the rulers of Egypt and Syria not declared day after day that their goal was the destruction of Israel, it would never have occurred to us to depart from the frontiers fixed by the Armistice Agreement. This was my firm opinion throughout the years, which to my satisfaction was supported by the great majority of my people. Even those who favored an "undivided Land of Israel" never suggested that we embark on an expansionist war.

I am aware that the Government of the Fourth Republic, and you too, my dear General, kept your country's embassy in Tel Aviv, as did many other European nations, we well as Russia and the United States, though ambassadors themselves were always received in Jerusalem. But I do not know of a single instance in which the United Nations or any of its members protested to the Government of Jordan for having conquered the old city of Jerusalem in 1948 and expelled all the Jews, destroying Jewish synagogues and denying us access to our holy sites in violation of the Armistice Agreement. To this nobody objected. We, on the other hand, never harmed the Christian and Moslem places of worship that were in our possession. We did not demand special credit for having done this, but rather regarded it as the simple fulfillment of our human duty to respect the faith of others.

As you know, I am now no more than an ordinary citizen of our state. After having served for 15 years as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, I considered it advisable to relinquish power to my juniors. I am currently engaged in writing a history of Jewish settlement in Israel since 1870, the year in which a group of French Jews established the agricultural school in Mikveh Israel (which in Hebrew means both "The Hope of Israel" and "The Gathering of Israel") as a first step toward the reconstitution of the State of Israel.

But I am still familiar with the spirit of my people, both in this country and throughout the world, and I know that my people, no less than any people in the world, is devoutly loyal to the vision of world peace that was proclaimed for the first time in human history by the prophets of Israel. And if the Great Powers can prevail upon the Arab nations to keep the peace in the Middle East and they are in a position to do so because the Arabs are in need of weapons which they themselves will be unable to produce for a long time to come I am convinced that it will never be broken by Israel.

Having still been in office at the time that the Fifth Republic came into being, I know that friendly relations prevailed between the reborn State of Israel and France during the years of the Fifth Republic as well. I never found it necessary to envisage a friendship more sincere and loyal that your own, nor did I see in your desire to build good and friendly relations with the Arab states any necessary contradiction to the continuation of your friendship with Israel. Even should the Arab states continue to threaten us with destruction as they have done all these years, I would never advise a single country to suspend its relations with them. Should we have to defend our lives again, I would not want the soldiers of another country to die in our behalf; our sons will protect our people, as they have done in the past. My only request from our friend is that they should not deny us the assistance we need to maintain a deterrent power capable of preventing our neighbors from attacking us.

I must beg your pardon for having written at such length. I felt it my duty both because of the gratitude I feel for your amity and assistance to Israel and because of the personal friendship you have shown for me as recently as our meeting this year to explain to you our true position on international issues. We believe that the Jew deserves to be treated as anyone else, and the Jewish People as any other people, large or small. We regard ourselves as having the same rights and obligations as everyone else, neither more nor less.

And as to the concept of "the Chosen People" that you referred to in your speech, in our Torah it is written: "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God…And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people" (Deuteronomy, 26: 17-18). The Jewish People was the first people in the world, as I have already said, to recognize the existence of one sole God, and thereby it became a peculiar people, a chosen people. We read in the Book of Joshua too: "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, we are witnesses…So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem" (Joshua 24: 22-25). In later generations as well, the sages of Israel declared: "God importuned every nation to accept His Torah. When none proved willing, he turned to Israel and they said: "We will act and obey."

It is clear from all this that according to our religion it was not God who chose Israel, but Israel which chose God. This is a historic fact known to every Christian and every Moslem in the world. No Greek need feel ashamed that twenty-four or twenty-six hundred years ago his people was the first on earth to discover certain scientific and philosophical truths. Neither need we feel ashamed of ourselves.

But our people does not consider it superior to others. We are of course proud of the fact the "Love thy neighbor as thyself" was said for the first time in our Bible, and that it is followed by the words: "And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and tho shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19: 33-34. Such a law did not exist even in the Athens of Pericles, Socrates and Plato.

And as mush as we desire to make it possible for every Jews who so wishes to live in his homeland as a human being and as a Jew whose rights and obligations are equal to those of every other person and every other people we have always and will always continue to devote ourselves to the ideals of peace, human brotherhood, justice and truth, as we were commanded to do by our prophets.

In closing, I should like to express my gratitude and appreciation for all that your great people has done in the past two hundred years to promote values and national liberty, and to express to you, my dear General, my esteem for what you have dome to augment the name, honor and standing of your country, and for the loyal help and true friendship that you have manifested all these years towards the Jewish People in its land. I hope that the friendly relations between Israel and France as part of the friendly relations between all peoples will continue with our assistance and the help of every people and person faithful to the ideals of the Book of Books.

Veuilles recevoir, Monsieur le President, mes voeux les meilleurs pour la reussite de votre haute mission.

D.B.G.